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1998 Legislative Review

7TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT UPDATE FROM SENATOR BOB MORTON

Improving public safety, helping children read, taking responsibility for our resources

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As I was preparing this review of the 1998 legislative session, I thought back to some of the goals we set back in January. In my pre-session newsletter, I spoke with you about:

- Cracking down on drunken drivers;
- Providing locally based watershed management plans;
- Taking responsibility for restoring our state's salmon runs;
- Ensuring adequate temporary housing for our migrant farm workers; and
- Improving the state's basic education system.

Now, I am proud to share with you how we've reached every one of those goals. We reached those goals without raising your taxes and without spending beyond the original \$19 billion budget we set in 1997. This is the first time in 40 years the Legislature has kept spending within the original budget in a supplemental budget year!

Over the years, many of you have asked, "Instead of just going to Olympia and passing more laws, why don't you take a minute and pull some of them off the books?" So every session, I go through and find some outdated or unnecessary laws to take off the books. This session, I found 54 chapters to remove from our law books and the Governor approved!

Coming into the 1998 session, I asked for your opinions on many important issues. Throughout this legislative review, I will include the results of the 1998 survey so you can compare what you told me with what really happened in the Legislature. You'll find your opinion really does count!

If you missed out on the opportunity to provide your views in our survey, I would like to invite you to attend one of the many Chamber of Commerce meetings I will be visiting throughout the next couple of months. I've included a list of these meetings on the back of this mailing.

Throughout my years as a 7th District legislator, I've been blessed to work with so many of you. I thank you for allowing me to serve you in Olympia and encourage those of you who haven't contacted my office to feel free to call me any time I can be of assistance.

Cordially yours,

Sen. Bob Morton
7th Legislative District



Legislative Review

Getting tough with drunken drivers

Almost all of us know a friend or loved one who has been devastated by the tragedy of drunken driving. National statistics show that two out of every five people will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives. This session, the Legislature took steps to make our state a leader in drunken driving prevention and punishment, including:

- Lowering the legal blood alcohol level from 0.10 to 0.08;
- Imposing a 90-day administrative license suspension for first-time drunken driving offenders;
- Requiring ignition interlock devices on the vehicles of people repeatedly convicted of Driving Under the Influence (DUI) to prevent their cars from starting if the device senses alcohol on their breath;
- Limiting to once in a lifetime the ability to avoid prosecution by agreeing to enter a counseling program; and
- Changing the “five-year washout” period whereby prior drunken driving convictions are removed from the offender’s record after five years to keep the offense on record for seven years.

In our survey of the 7th District, 40 percent of you supported the permanent loss of driving privileges after two DUI convictions. Another 33 percent of you supported taking a person’s license away after three convictions. The Legislature considered a “Three Strikes and You Walk” proposal but it was modified to require in-home monitoring instead.

Protecting our families from sex offenders

In our survey, close to 90 percent of you supported some sort of law to keep sex offenders from living too close to our schools. This session, we passed a comprehensive law to keep a tighter rein on sex offenders. This bill says:

- Offenders from other states living, working, or going to school in our state must register;
- Offenders must register with the appropriate agency upon release from custody and that agency must forward the information within three days to the county where the offender will reside;
- All offenders must provide a photograph and fingerprints during the registration process; and
- If an offender moves, they must send notice to the county sheriff within 72 hours of moving instead of the current 14 days.

Thanks to Lincoln County Sheriff Dan Berry, I was able to add another provision to this bill limiting the ability of sex offenders to change their names. This provision will protect our communities and families by giving our law enforcement better ability to track sex offenders.

Governor Locke has signed this bill into law.

Giving teachers more tools to help students read

In spring 1997, our fourth grade children were tested on reading, writing, communication, and math. We were disappointed to find that only 48 percent of the students met or exceeded our state’s new reading standards.

Reading is the key to learning and there’s nothing more satisfying than helping your children or grandchildren learn to read. That’s why I joined in introducing “The Successful Readers Act.”

This bill creates two voluntary grant programs to help improve students’ reading scores. The first program provides roughly \$9 million for teachers in kindergarten through second grade for additional training and instructional materials. The second gives elementary schools about \$8 million in grants to help teachers train volunteer tutors and mentors for children from kindergarten through the sixth grade.

Local school districts are not required to participate. It’s up to your local school districts to make the decision to apply for these grants and start these new reading programs.

Governor Locke has signed this bill into law.

Working together on the state’s salmon crisis

In our survey, results were fairly even when you were asked who to blame for the salmon crisis. Roughly 33 percent blamed overfishing, 27 percent thought the resource was mismanaged, 21 percent thought the dams were the problem, and 19 percent blamed human activity.

This session, the Legislature made a \$61 million commitment to salmon recovery which addresses many of these problems. This commitment includes \$36 million for immediate salmon recovery and water management projects and approximately \$25 million in transportation-related projects in the six-year transportation plan.

I contributed several pieces of the salmon recovery plan, including a



proposal to purchase licenses from commercial fishers and charter boat operators to reduce harvest out in the ocean. Once a person sells a license back to the state, the license is permanently retired. This proposal is considered a positive step toward restoring the good-faith relationship between Washington and the British Columbians, who complain we catch too many of their limited salmon runs.

The Legislature also approved my proposal to expand the use of remote site incubators. These “egg boxes” give volunteers a chance to help preserve and restore our natural salmon runs across the state. Volunteers would receive coho, chum, and chinook salmon eggs provided by the state Department of Fish & Wildlife to rear in the remote site incubators, then release the juvenile salmon into the wild. Governor Locke has signed this bill into law.

New options for farm worker housing

With more than 230 food, feed, and seed crops, the diversity of Washington state’s agriculture is exceeded only by California. Each year, thousands of migrant workers enter our communities to help us harvest these crops. And each year, our growers are frustrated by the inability to provide adequate and economical shelter for these temporary workers.

Last session, the Legislature approved a proposal allowing growers to build temporary housing for their workers using a relaxed building code. The Governor vetoed this bill. This session, the Legislature came back with an improved version of the bill including a one-time appropriation totalling \$2 million to provide grants for permanent

Sen. Bob Morton welcomes guests from home throughout the legislative session. Jim & Judy Richardson, pictured here, testified about the need to control Eurasian watermilfoil on Loon Lake. In response, Morton included a provision in the 1998 supplemental budget directing the state Department of



Ecology to provide a grant to the Stevens County Weed Board to cover 50 percent of the cost of herbicide treatments to this noxious weed.

housing for migrant and low-income farm workers. The Governor recently signed that bill into law.

In our 7th district survey, nearly 64 percent said they supported a temporary worker housing code to allow farmers to voluntarily provide shelter for their workers without having to adhere to the more stringent state building code. This new law gives farmers the opportunity to provide safe and economical shelter for their workers during harvest.

Funding transportation needs, cutting license tab fees

Coming into the 1998 session, Governor Locke proposed an 11-cent gas tax increase to pay for necessary transportation projects. With an \$800 million surplus in Washington’s general fund, the Legislature simply could not fathom forcing such a tax increase on our state’s drivers.

Instead we crafted a plan, using existing license tab funds, to pay

for \$2.4 billion in state transportation projects. It also reduces the amount you pay when you renew your license tabs by roughly \$30 per vehicle.

Despite what many of us think, revenue from the license tab fee is not spent solely on road projects. Much of this fee is directed toward city and county criminal justice programs. As we recalculated how this money was used, we transferred the responsibility for many of these programs back to the state’s general fund. This allowed us to not only protect these programs but increase funding by 10 percent.

Another part of this proposal increases juvenile justice funding in distressed counties and enhances sales tax equalization in cities with a small retail base. Cities and counties in the 7th District will receive more than \$1.6 million.

This proposal will be on the November 1998 ballot as Referendum Bill No. 49.

Local control in state watersheds

A common saying around the state is “Whiskey’s for drinking and water’s for fightin’ over.” This session, the fighting continued as we struggled to craft a watershed management proposal that retained local control, protected existing water rights, and provided a fair forum where all interests felt they were represented at the table.

The final proposal allows local governments to develop integrated water management plans to coordinate the use of groundwater, rivers, streams and lakes across our state. The plans may consider how clean the water is, how much water is used, and how much water is necessary for fish to migrate and spawn. These plans must include strategies for increasing the amount of water available to use. The state’s supplemental budget includes \$5 million for watershed planning.

Governor Locke has signed 12 of the 17 sections of this bill into law.

1998 Chamber of Commerce Meetings:

Monday, March 30:
JOINT OKANOGAN & OMAK
CHAMBERS
12 noon, Cedar’s Inn

Wednesday, April 1:
REPUBLIC CHAMBER
12 noon, Hometown Pizza

Thursday, April 2:
SPRINGDALE CHAMBER
12 noon, Geronomo’s

Monday, April 6:
CHEWELAH CHAMBER
12 noon, Polanksi’s

Tuesday, April 7:
WILBUR CHAMBER
12 noon, Me and Ma’s Cafe.

Thursday, April 9:
OROVILLE CHAMBER
1:00 p.m., FAO’s

Thursday, April 9:
METALINE FALLS CHAMBER
7:00 p.m., Hoogy’s

Monday, April 13:
IONE CHAMBER
6:00 p.m., Papa’s Place

Tuesday, April 14:
ODESSA CHAMBER
12 noon, Old City Hall

Tuesday, May 5:
COLVILLE CHAMBER
12 noon, Cookies

Tuesday, May 12:
TONASKET CHAMBER
12 noon, Whistler’s

Wednesday, May 13:
KETTLE FALLS CHAMBER
12 noon, Donny’s Pizza

Thursday, May 14:
NEWPORT CHAMBER
6:00 p.m., Big Wheel Pizza

Tuesday, May 19:
DEER PARK CHAMBER
12 noon, Pizza Factory

Thursday, May 21:
DAVENPORT CHAMBER
12 noon, location TBA